

# Write a Retention Schedule

Figure 1. The Process of Retention Scheduling

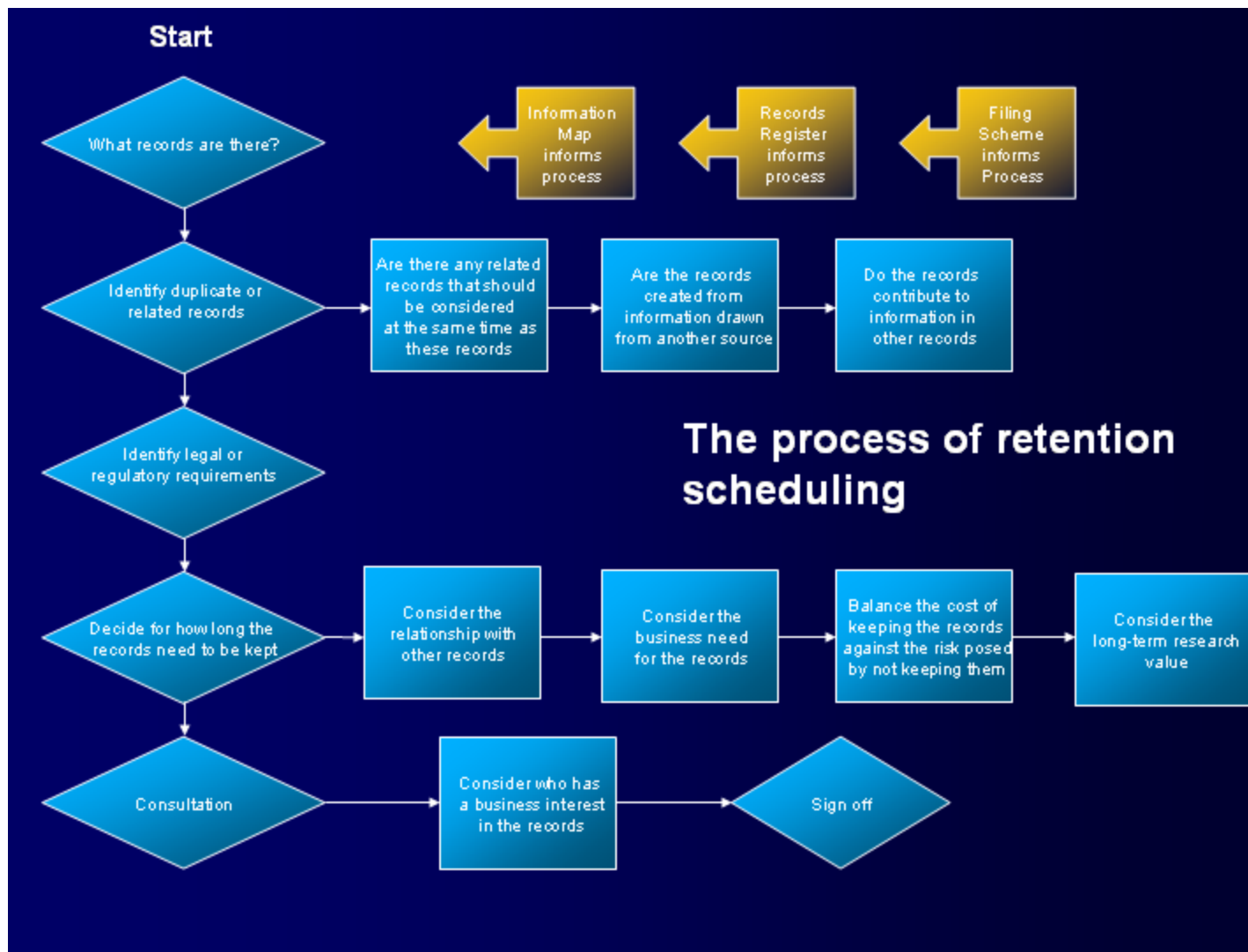


Figure 2, Part 1. Deciding what Records to Retain

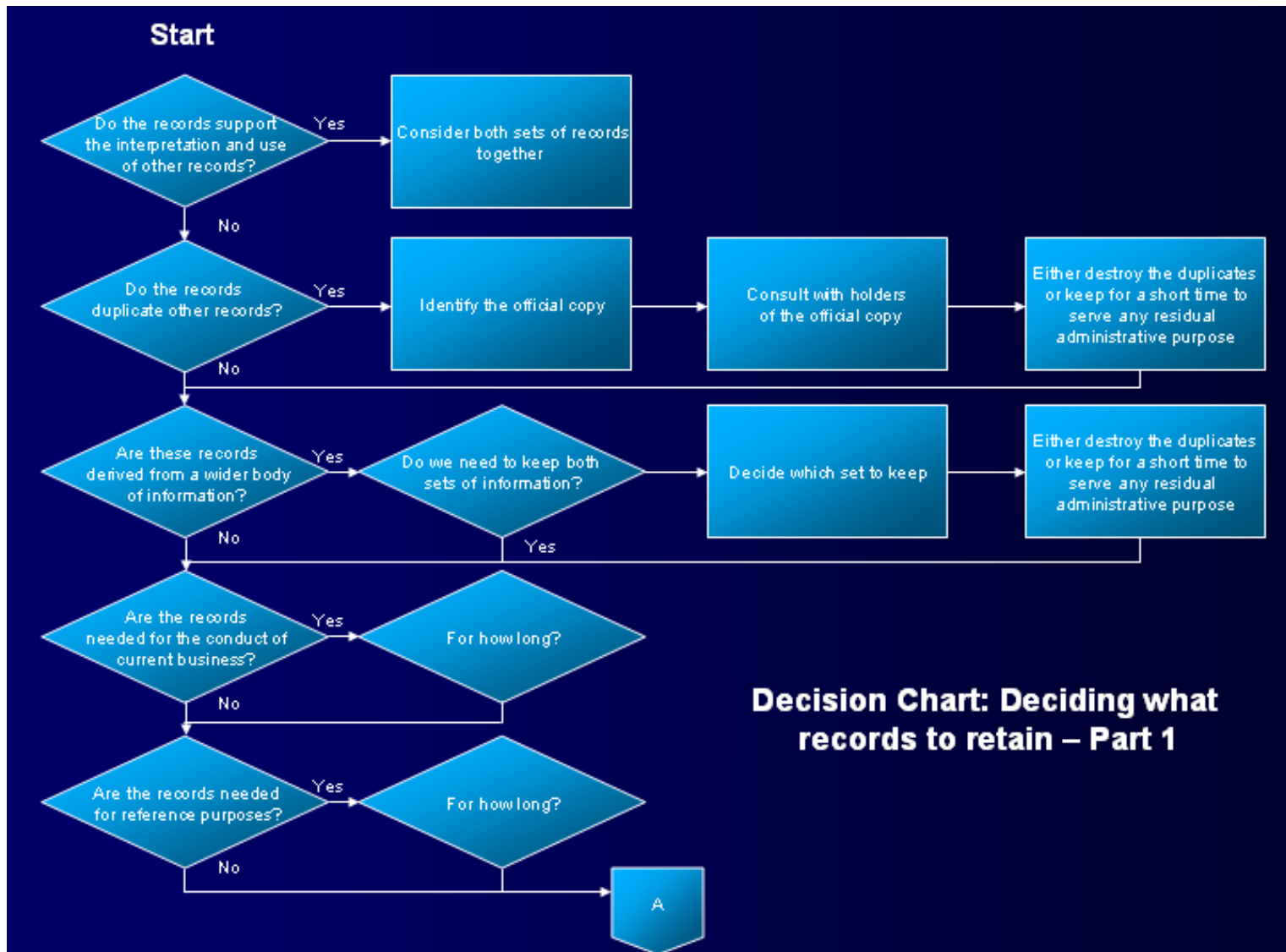
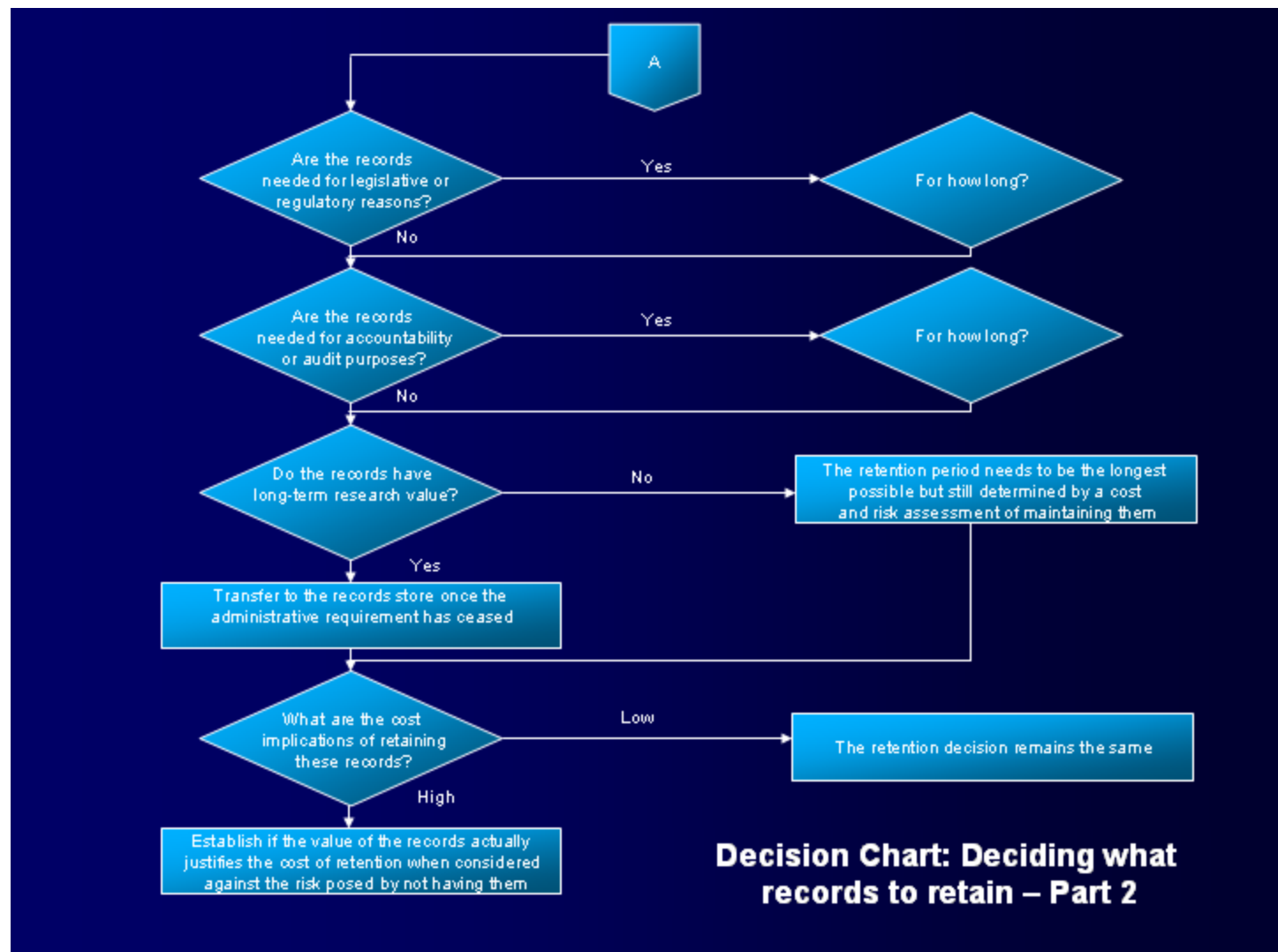


Figure 3, Part 2: Deciding What Records to Maintain



# Background Information on Scheduling Records

## 1. What is a retention schedule?

1.1. A retention schedule is a control document that sets out the amount of time that NOAA needs to keep certain types of records. It applies to all records irrespective of the format in which they are maintained or the media upon which they are held.

1.2. A Retention schedule does not look at individual records but rather at the individual group, record series or collection of related records that we file together, use together and, for retention purposes, evaluate together. This is done in order to:

- assess their value as a source of information in relation to the business of which they are output;
- determine their importance as evidence of NOAA's business activity and/or decision making;
- determine whether there are any legal or regulatory retention requirements in relation to the records, and to assess the risks of not complying with those requirements.

1.3. The schedule covers all records, irrespective of medium, and should be applied to electronic records as well as paper-based ones.

## **2. Why is a retention schedule needed?**

2.1. Keeping unnecessary records wastes staff time, uses up valuable space and incur unnecessary costs. It also imposes a risk liability when it comes to servicing requests for information requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

2.2. Retention schedules promote control over NOAA's records, enabling NOAA to confidently destroy records that are time expired while at the same time ensuring NOAA that records required for business are retained - this is simply good economy and efficient practice.

2.3. It can be a personal criminal offence to destroy requested information under either the Records Act or the Freedom of Information Act. A retention schedule helps NOAA to demonstrate clearly that records destruction has taken place in accordance with proper retention procedures and not as a result of individual caprice or malice.

## **3. What information should be included in the retention schedule?**

3.1. A retention schedule should contain all of the following elements:

- the name of the office that either creates or holds the records concerned - the official copy holder;
- a description of the records;
- the disposal action – this will either be to destroy, transfer to the NARA or, in very exceptional circumstances, review at a later (and always specified) date;

- the retention period - this is the minimum period for which the records need to be retained before the disposal action is undertaken;
- the authority upon which the disposal action and retention period are based. Most often this will be a legislative or regulatory authority or an internal statutory authority; and
- the event which triggers the disposal action.

#### **4. Where does responsibility lie for the creation and maintenance of the retention schedule?**

4.1. It is the responsibility of each office to develop and implement a retention schedule for the records it holds. This can be done by those responsible for carrying out the functions and activities that are covered by the office in collaboration with the office records custodian and records liaison officer.

#### **5. How to create the retention schedule?**

5.1. There are five stages to the creation of a retention schedule. See Figure 1 for diagrammatic representation.

5.2. You first need to establish what records you have. Preliminary research is essential for this, so if you have not taken an inventory of your records, now is the time to do it. This will tell you what records your office creates and what business purpose they are used and kept for, including evidential, audit and reference purposes.

5.3. You then need to identify any duplicate or related records. Examples of the type of question you will need to ask here:

- Are there any related records in either paper or electronic format that you need to consider at the same time as the records directly under consideration? And - Do these records support the interpretation and use of other records? If the answer is yes to either, you will need to consider both of the sets of records together, in order to ensure that the retention period reflects the combined requirement.
- Are the records under consideration created from information that is held in another record series? And - Do the records duplicate other records that are held within the office area or elsewhere? If the answer is yes to either, you will need to decide which set is the official record copy. (For example, the chair or secretary of a committee will hold the official copy of that particular committee's papers).
- Do the records in this series contribute to the information contained in records belonging to another series? And - How much value do they add? Does the agency need to keep both series, or will one or the other be sufficient?

5.4. Once 5.3 are complete, find out if there is any legislation or regulations that will affect the retention of the records. The agency needs to keep some records for legal or regulatory reasons and examples of such records would be health and safety records, contractual records and financial records. Check NOAA's Records Retention Schedule for guidance. The people who actually create the records are

the most likely to know if there is a legislative or regulatory requirement for keeping them - so ask them.

5.5. Now you need to consider the business need for the records. Examples of the type of question you will need to ask here are:

- how long will there be a continuing need for these records for current business processes?
- how long are the records required for evidential purposes in respect of business processes or decision making?
- how long do the records need to be kept for accountability/internal audit purposes?

5.6. Now consider the risk of not having the records, balanced against the cost of keeping them. Bear in mind that every record or document retained has a resource implication for the agency not only in terms of storage and general administration, but also in respect of its freedom of information and/or other obligations.

Finally, consider if the records have long-term research value. Records where this would apply would include such things as the final minutes and papers of agency official committees, or background discussions and correspondence evidencing the agency involvement outside of itself. e.g. collaboration with industry or involvement with a local/regional project.



5.7. Figure 3 shows all five steps of the retention process as a flow chart and Figure 2 shows the same steps as part of a decision chart.

5.8. When developing your retention schedule, always involve as many people with an interest in the area as possible. This will ensure that the schedule has a significant consultative dimension and meets all of the needs of your office business process.

5.9. Consultation is important - The final draft retention schedule must be cleared by the proper people within your office before it is transmitted to NOAA's Records Officer for concurrence and transmittal to the NARA for review and approval.

## **6. How to implement the retention schedule?**

6.1. You are responsible for ensuring disposal actions are undertaken at the prescribed dates and in a manner commensurate with the sensitivity and/or confidentiality of the material.

6.2. You need to organize your files so that it is possible to efficiently discharge the disposal instructions given in the retention schedule.

## **7. How do I maintain a retention schedule?**

7.1. It is generally advisable to review the schedule yearly to confirm that it is still relevant. Issues to consider are:

- check that the business functions are the same since the scheme was compiled; (change is unlikely here , business functions are generally stable, – but the question nevertheless still needs to be asked)
- check that the business processes have not changed; (change is more likely here as it focuses on ‘how things are done’ rather than ‘what is done’)
- check that the records that are being generated have not changed;
- check that the regulatory or legislative framework has not changed;
- check that the schedule still meets business needs.

7.2. It is important to remember that the review process is there to identify changes that might otherwise have been overlooked - it is not intended to replace the informal changes and additions that need to be made to the schedule as and when the business requires it. The review process therefore, is no substitute for good, on-going, records management.